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United Nations

Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Report on the first session (22-26 July 2002)

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Note

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures.

Summary

The Committee of Experts on Public Administration held its first session at United Nations Headquarters from 22 to 26 July 2002. The Committee, which was established by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2001/45, consists of 24 experts appointed in their personal capacity.

In accordance with Council decision 2002/206, the Committee discussed: (a) enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration, (b) basic data on the public sector, and (c) United Nations activities on public administration.

The Committee identified six priority areas in which member States could build their capacity to implement the Millennium Declaration, as follows:

(a) The public sector must develop a strategy to recruit and retain its fair share of the best talent;

(b) Public sector institutions must become strategic and strong "learning organizations" in a globalized and knowledge-based economy;

(c) Public sector institutions should harness the power of information and communication technologies in support of innovation and good governance;

(d) Governments should align financial and management capacities to ensure the optimal mobilization and use of resources;

(e) Governments should design and implement effective combinations of decentralization and centralization policies and programmes in order to promote people-centred development;

(f) Capacity-building efforts could be assisted by the development of evidence-based international data.

Given the special needs of Africa, the Committee recommended a special focus in terms of support and technical and professional assistance for Africa. The work of the United Nations should take into account the partnership concept advocated by the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

The Committee reviewed the United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance and made recommendations on future directions in the following areas: enabling advocacy; developing analytical and policy tools; sharing experience; coordinating development assistance in public administration; building a common understanding; and providing technical assistance in developing human resources, building institutions and ensuring technological adequacy and connectivity.

The Committee welcomed the first issue of the *World Public Sector Report* and the achievements of the United Nations Online Network on Public Administration and Finance. Finally, it recommended that 23 June be designated United Nations Public Service Day.

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Chapter I
Organization of the session

A. Duration of the session

1. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration, which was established by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2001/45 and consists of 24 experts appointed in their personal capacity by the Council upon the nomination of the Secretary-General, held its first session at United Nations Headquarters from 22 to 26 July 2002.

B. Attendance

2. The session was attended by the following members: Marie-Françoise Bechtel (France), Director, Ecole nationale d'administration; Rachid Benmokhtar Benabdellah (Morocco), President, Al Akhawayn University; Jocelyne Bourgon (Canada), President, Canadian Centre for Management Development; Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (Brazil), Getúlio Vargas Foundation; Giuseppe Franco Ferrari (Italy), Chair for Public Comparative Law, L. Bocconi University of Milan; Geraldine J. Fraser-Moleketi (South Africa), Minister for Public Service and Administration; Werner Jann (Germany), Chair for Political Science, Administration and Organization, Potsdam University; Jin Liqun (China), Vice Minister of Finance; Barbara Kudrycka (Poland), Rector, Bialystok School of Public Administration; Gonzalo D. Martner Fanta (Chile), Deputy Secretary, Ministerio Secretaría General de la Presidencia; Kuldeep Mathur (India), Academic Director, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University; Beshara Merhej (Lebanon), Member of Parliament and Minister of State; José Oscar Monteiro (Mozambique); Akira Nakamura (Japan), Dean of the Graduate School, Department of Political Science, Meiji University; Apolo Nsibambi (Uganda), Prime Minister; Dennis A. Rondinelli (United States), Glaxo Distinguished International Professor of Management, Kenan-Flagler Business School, University of North Carolina; Otton Solis-Fallas (Costa Rica), Member of the Board of the Open University of Costa Rica; Borwornsak Uwanno (Thailand), Secretary-General, King Prajadhipok Institute; Volodymyr G. Yatsuba (Ukraine), State Secretary, Cabinet of Ministers. The following members could not attend: Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara (Cameroon), Minister of Higher Education; Petrus Compton (Saint Lucia), Attorney-General and Minister for Justice; Jaime Rodriguez-Arana Munoz (Spain), Director, Instituto Nacional de Administracion Pública; Patricia A. Santo Tomas (Philippines), Minister of Labour and Employment; Sakhir Thiam (Senegal), President, University of Dakar-Bourguiba.

C. Agenda

3. In accordance with Council decision 2002/206, the agenda of the Committee for its first session was as follows:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
3. Enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration.
4. Basic data on the public sector.
5. Review of United Nations activities on public administration.
6. Proposed programme of work and agenda for the second session of the Committee.

D. Election of officers

4. The Committee elected the following officers by acclamation:

Chairperson

Prime Minister Apolo Nsibambi (Uganda)

Vice-Chairpersons

Marie-Françoise Bechtel (France)
Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (Brazil)
Jin Liqun (China)
Beshara Merhej (Lebanon)

Rapporteur

Jocelyne Bourgon (Canada).

Chapter II
Main findings and recommendations

5. The establishment of the Committee placed the transformation of governance and public administration at the forefront of the United Nations agenda. At its first session, the Committee stressed the urgency of supporting member States in building capacity to meet the basic needs of their populations at the dawn of the new millennium, and applauded the historical global consensus on targets for meeting basic needs that had been established through the United Nations Millennium Declaration. It also recognized the importance of reforming governance and public administration institutions for attaining the vision of sustainable human development of the Millennium Declaration.

6. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the high-quality work of its secretariat in preparing the documents for the session, which are listed in the annex. It noted that it wished to use those documents in the future as reference documents, and therefore suggested that its secretariat review the documents with a view to reflecting the suggestions of the experts, consolidating and streamlining them, where appropriate.

7. The Committee recognized that there was no universal blueprint for reforms. However, it believed that much could be gained from the practices of United Nations Member States. The Committee also recognized that specific national agendas for change must be shaped within countries themselves, taking into account their specific social and economic conditions. The Committee hoped that its work could help reformers around the world by identifying good practices, highlighting lessons learned and reducing risks.

8. Governance reflected the sum of the multifaceted interactions among the state, the market and civil society. The Committee was focusing on state governance, given the importance of the state, its impact on its partners and its crucial role as an enabler of the market and civil society. Public administrations alone could not meet all the challenges of governance. The private sector and civil society also had an important role. It was necessary to work in partnership with other governance players and stakeholders.

9. The Committee recognized the importance of building on the reform efforts carried out during recent decades. Countries have made progress towards sound fiscal management and have carried out financial reforms. An international consensus on financing for development was achieved at the International Conference on Financing for Development, and the Millennium Declaration had expressed a comprehensive vision for sustainable human development.

10. The Committee was convinced that the global consensus expressed in the Millennium Declaration offered a remarkable opportunity for the United Nations to show leadership in the area of good governance and sound public administration.

A. Global priorities

11. In drafting the present report, the Committee did not attempt to summarize the documents submitted or to give a detailed account of the discussions held during the session. Instead, it attempted to extract the key elements of a consensus that could guide future work in support of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

12. In selecting the major priority areas for future work, the Committee hoped to guide member States through the Council by pointing towards domains presenting great challenges and great opportunities for state governance and public administration in the future. It decided, rather than to prepare an exhaustive list of recommendations, to identify a targeted and highly selective number of areas in order to encourage real progress over a short period of time.

13. The Committee was of the view that the challenge of good state governance involved capacity-building through people and institutions. Through their knowledge, know-how and skills, people were at the heart of the performance of the state since it was people who provided services, made innovations and carried out reforms. Good governance must take account of the culture and circumstances of member States.

14. The Committee recommended that future work on state governance and public administration be focused on six key areas, as described below.

Challenge No. 1
To build capacity, the public sector must recruit and retain its fair share of the best talent

15. Member States should consider identifying and studying the key elements of a strategy aimed at achieving the above. Some elements were predictable. Much depended on:

- The reputation of public sector institutions.
- An efficient recruitment strategy, based on merit and competence combined with a retention strategy of the most critical skills.
- Reasonable compensation and adequate working conditions.

16. However, much more work needed to be done in order to:

- Understand the interdependency of those elements and identify good practices.
- Promote ethical standards and combat corruption.
- Recognize diversity, promote inclusiveness and gender equality.
- Address the brain drain issue, resulting from the competition for talent between the private and public sectors and between the developing and developed countries.
- Focus the work of public sector institutions on those functions that only the state can perform or can best perform.

Challenge No. 2
In response to the impact of globalization and the emergence of a knowledge-based economy, public sector institutions must become "learning organizations" that are recognized as strong and strategic institutions

17. Member States should consider exploring the concept of public sector learning organizations and identifying both the essential elements and the concrete steps needed to support that transformation.

18. That transformation would take different forms and proceed at different paces, depending upon the circumstances of Member States, but it would probably involve such shifts as:

- From individual task to the performance of the overall organization.
- From focus on a job to focus on mission and results.
- From training to lifelong learning.
- From repetition of predictable functions to innovation.
- From employment for life to employability with safeguards.
- From a top-down management model to horizontal teams and networks.
- From an inward to an outward orientation towards all segments of society.

19. The purpose of that transformation effort would be to explore how to create a dynamic culture that could be conducive for the developing countries to leap-frog over stages of development and reap more rapidly the benefits of a nascent knowledge economy.

20. Furthermore, conceptual work would be essential to support progress in the sectoral areas responsible for the issues highlighted in the Millennium Declaration and the road map for its implementation, such as income poverty, hunger, access to water and sanitation, slums, health, education, employment, gender and environment. Member States would better achieve the targets in those areas if they could rely on innovations and horizontal processes, as exemplified by public sector learning organizations.

21. The Committee believed that the search for improvements in service delivery would probably be more successful through the participation of beneficiaries.

Challenge No. 3
Capacity-building in support of state governance would require the harnessing of the power of information and communication technologies in support of innovation

22. Capturing data and disseminating information was a challenge for all Governments. However, they were only the first steps towards capturing knowledge and supporting innovation in the public sector, the economy and the society at large.

23. The Committee recognized the quality of the work done by the Secretariat on the topics "Capacity of the public sector to support the creation and application of knowledge, innovation and technology for development"

and "The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: e-government, known applications and enabling environment", and recommended that further work be undertaken to better define the role of the state as enabler and as user of knowledge and technology in order to support and encourage innovation throughout the public administration and the society as a whole.

24. As enabler, the role of the state included:

- Building the learning infrastructure of the country, including sector-specific systems for knowledge, innovation and technology in such areas as health, education and poverty alleviation.
- Connectivity and networks.
- A legislative framework that was conducive to innovation, encouraged private sector investments and promoted the use of information and communication technology.

25. As user, public sector institutions could set a powerful example by using knowledge, innovation and technology in their operations, and could transform the operations of government by:

- Encouraging transparency and accountability.
- Improving service delivery (quality, timeliness, efficiency).
- Providing services in a citizen-centred way.
- Making available knowledge and technology that is publicly owned.

Challenge No. 4
Capacity-building in support of state governance requires the alignment of financial and management capacities to ensure the optimal mobilization and use of resources

26. Much had been done in recent years to improve financial management (financial policies, resource mobilization, accounting and reporting). Sustainable progress required an integrated and more holistic approach to capacity-building, linking finance and management, inputs and outputs, and rooting them in oversight bodies, including the public at large.

27. Whatever the philosophy of the government in office and whatever the scope of its activities, Governments should make efforts to work better, that is, to optimize results for any given level of resources. In that regard, further work was required in order to identify the critical factors that could guide Member States' decisions on the proper balance between centralized and decentralized responsibilities in fiscal and financial administration.

28. Member States might need the help of the Secretariat to identify how public administration reforms could best increase effectiveness and efficiency, reduce the cost of government and release resources to meet higher societal needs.

Challenge No. 5
Capacity-building also meant to design and implement effective combinations of decentralization and centralization policies and programmes in order to promote people-centred development

29. Member States should consider designing and implementing effective decentralization policies and programmes (financial and administrative) and building the capacity of governance institutions at the central, subnational and local levels to accomplish the millennium development goals.

30. That involved, among other things, the following:

- Examining appropriate forms of decentralization, delegation and devolution.
- To that end, assessing the new capacities needed at the central, subnational and local levels.
- Forging partnerships between public sector organizations at all levels and in governance institutions at the centre, including electoral management bodies, parliamentary support structures and judicial administration.
- Providing a legal context for the participation of civil society organizations in public sector-initiated policies and programmes.
- Analysing the subsidiarity of authority and resources.

31. Much more work needs to be done to:

- Understand the linkages between decentralization and poverty reduction, including enhanced access to such services as primary health care, education and shelter.

- Strengthen the capacity of electoral management bodies and support structures for parliaments.
- Improve the financial and administrative capacity of local governments.
- Enhance cooperation among local governments.
- Identify functions that were more conducive to centralized or decentralized modes of programme design and implementation.
- Strengthen central-local fiscal relations.
- Promote "local-local" partnerships among local actors in civil society, the business sector and local governments.

Challenge No. 6
State capacity-building can be assisted by evidence-based international data

32. The Committee noted the importance of the *World Public Sector Report* and complimented the Secretariat for the relevance and quality of its first issue.

33. The Committee recognized the importance of the work done by the Secretariat to date in the areas of the identification and collection of basic data on the public sector in the world. The Committee showed a keen interest in furthering such discussion and work, and therefore recommended mandating a subcommittee to refine a proposal prepared by the Secretariat on a global public sector monitor.

B. Special needs of Africa

34. The Millennium Declaration highlighted the special needs of African countries. Although every country in the world faced challenges in building capacity in governance and public administration, that work was most daunting in Africa. The challenges arose from the continent's recent history, the poverty, violent conflict and communicable diseases (including HIV/AIDS) in many of its countries, and its marginalization in a globalizing world.

35. The Committee recognized the efforts of the African people over the years to bring about public sector reforms. The modern state and administration in Africa, given their particular history, were not fully rooted in society as a whole and were therefore fragile and unstable. Support for public administration, in order to reach the millennium declaration goals, required strengthening the legitimization of public institutions, which:

- Would in some cases involve rebuilding or building institutions rather than improving existing structures.
- Required the study of the articulation among the necessary modern states, public administrations and less well-known but functional mechanisms of governance at community and societal levels.
- Should take into account the organizational culture of Africa.

36. In view of the fact that Africa was most at risk of not meeting the goals set out in the road map for the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, the Committee recommended a special focus in terms of providing support and technical and professional assistance to Africa.

37. It further recommended that all future work of the United Nations in the area of state governance and public administration in Africa take account of the initiatives planned or undertaken in terms of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as well as the G-8 Africa Action Plan, in order to ensure maximum synergy and to be supportive of the partnership concept advocated by NEPAD.

38. Finally, the technical assistance activities of the Division for Public Economics and Public Administration of the United Nations Secretariat should give priority attention to the needs of the region.

Chapter III
Review of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance

39. The Committee was briefed on the activities of the United Nations in the area of public administration, with particular emphasis on the modalities of work mandated by the General Assembly in its resolutions 50/225 and 56/213. It also considered a report by the Secretariat on the activities carried out to date. It reviewed proposals for future activities to assist the Secretary-General in preparing the proposed

programme budget in this field for the biennium 2004-2005.

40. The Committee fully supported the proposed work programme and recognized the importance of strengthening public administration through the following main activities: enabling advocacy; developing analytical and policy tools; sharing experience; coordinating development assistance in public administration; building a common understanding; and providing technical assistance in developing human resources, building institutions, and ensuring technological adequacy and connectivity.

41. The Committee also expressed the hope that the Division for Public Economics and Public Administration would make relevant substantive contributions to major international events related to its work, such as providing inputs concerning e-government to the forthcoming World Summit on Information Society.

42. As a new tool of advocacy, the Committee suggested that the Secretary-General provide, every one or two years, comments on the state of major governance issues. Such a statement could be made on the occasion of United Nations Public Service Day. The Committee proposed, in that respect, that United Nations Public Service Day coincide with African Public Service Day — 23 June.

43. The Committee took note with appreciation that the Secretariat was proceeding expeditiously with the implementation of the Economic and Social Council recommendation to confer public service awards to celebrate the value of public service. It also emphasized that, in future conferences and workshops, the United Nations should focus on the priority areas identified by the Committee and on public administration issues related to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

44. The Committee recognized that there was a significant demand and need for the development of analytical and policy tools which could benefit all countries. It also pointed out that in order to respond to the needs of Governments' officials effectively, analytical documents should be short, action-oriented and focused on the necessary conditions to ensure the successful implementation of good practices. A compendium of best practices should also be prepared and disseminated to member States. The Committee also acknowledged that the *World Public Sector Report* was a very important policy tool and could greatly contribute to the implementation of the millennium development goals.

45. The Committee reviewed the topic of the next issue of the *World Public Sector Report* and provided suggestions to the Secretariat. In addition, specific analytical and policy tools addressing the administrative dimensions of the key sectors to implement the millennium development goals (e.g., poverty eradication, primary education and health) should be developed.

46. The Committee agreed that building a common understanding on governance issues through the exchange of best practices and the convening of major conferences and forums was a crucial activity which should be pursued, building on the tremendous amount of work the United Nations had already accomplished.

47. The Committee took note of the request contained in General Assembly resolution 56/213 that the Secretary-General study the possibility of periodically bringing together high-level policy makers responsible for public administration reform, under the auspices of the United Nations, to discuss issues of common interest and share valuable experiences and practices. It also took note that the Secretariat, in response to that request, already intended to provide substantive support to the Global Forum on Reinventing Government, an existing initiative of that kind. Some members of the Committee felt that a more structured event under the direct auspices of the United Nations, such as the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly held in 1996, would respond more closely to the request contained in resolution 56/213.

48. The Committee also stressed that information-sharing and exchange of experiences was an important tool for strengthening public administration in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It recognized the achievements of the United Nations Online Network on Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) in facilitating such exchanges. It recommended that the role of UNPAN in providing advisory services and training be enhanced. The Committee also provided useful direction on the implementation of the request of the General Assembly that the UNPAN be expanded to strengthen the capacity of national ministries and institutions of public administration.

49. The Committee pointed out that since the Millennium Declaration placed high priority on meeting the special needs of Africa, technical assistance should focus prevalently on that continent. It also recommended that technical assistance be linked to regional initiatives, such as NEPAD, and that it focus on groups of countries rather than individual Member States. The Committee also suggested that when providing technical assistance, differences among countries should be taken into consideration and Governments be fully involved. Further, technical assistance should be directed to the priority areas highlighted by the Committee. The Committee recommended that policy advice be the main focus of technical assistance. In the area of human resources capacity-building, the Committee commended the joint initiative of the United Nations Secretariat and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration.

50. The Committee took note of the activities of the Secretariat to ensure synergies in the work on public administration among the various departments and agencies of the United Nations system. It welcomed the contribution to the meeting made by observers of United Nations departments and agencies and other international and regional organizations. It encouraged the Secretariat to continue to build upon the contributions and the comparative advantages of the various departments and agencies. Finally, it recognized the importance of the additional flow of development assistance to developing countries and countries in transition in that field. It endorsed the proposed initiative on aid management and accountability that could support that flow.

Chapter IV
Conclusion

51. The Committee expressed the view that it could serve as a brain trust or knowledge centre on state governance and public administration for the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations. Given the rapid changes and new developments that member States faced, it was important to pool technical expertise on emerging factors that affected their State capacity.

52. The state capacity-building activities undertaken by member States also had a direct impact on meeting the millennium development goals. The Committee requested the Economic and Social Council to consider authorizing annual meetings of the Committee in order to follow the progress of member States and the United Nations in enhancing the capacity of public administration to achieve the millennium development goals.

53. The work of the Committee would be facilitated by having designated members make organizational decisions prior to its meetings. Further, the Economic and Social Council required the Committee to set its meeting agendas in advance. Therefore, the Committee decided to establish a subcommittee to set its agendas and prepare its meetings. Other subcommittees, whether established by function or region, might also help to conduct the work of the Committee.

54. Overall, the Committee indicated its willingness to play an advocacy role on behalf of the international public administration community. There had been many United Nations and other global conferences on major themes, including the landmark Millennium Assembly. The challenge was to be relevant, focused and attuned to follow-up activities concerning internationally agreed commitments that affected governance and public administration.

Annex

List of documents

Document symbol	*Agenda item*	*Title or description*
E/C.16/2002/1	2	Agenda and organization of work
E/C.16/2002/2	4	Report of the Secretary-General on basic data on the public sector
E/C.16/2002/3	3	Report of the Secretariat entitled "The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: human resources development"
E/C.16/2002/4	3	Report of the Secretariat entitled "The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: institutional capacity development"
E/C.16/2002/5	3	Report of the Secretariat on the capacity of the public sector to support the creation and application of knowledge, innovation and technology for development
E/C.16/2002/6	3	Report of the Secretariat on the financing capacity of the public sector to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration
E/C.16/2002/7	3	Report of the Secretariat entitled "The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: e-government, known applications and enabling environment"

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